


Parnassus

Fall 1986





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Parnassus

INTER-ARTS MAGAZINE
OF
NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Fall 1986

Parnassus is the name of the mythological mountain home
of the nine muses who inspired humankind in the arts.

The policy of the editorial staff has been to select material for the magazine democratically. We have read each work submitted and viewed all artwork. We voted to determine eligibility: a majority vote for a piece meant publication. Parnassus provides an opportunity for new artists and writers to reach others; it's a showcase of student creativity.



YESTERDAY'S TREASURES

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Promises To Keep

by Bonnie Brennan

Through Hampton Falls into Hampton I relax in the luxury of the borrowed car that carries me through the last warm day of summer. I drive past Victorian architecture that tempts me into daydreams of a genteel and undemanding past. I smell the salt air and hear the gulls soliciting my attention above as my thoughts trail down the road leading to the beach, far from the writing assignment I've come here to fulfill.

I follow my map past the bar and around the corner. It takes a few minutes to locate the building but I find it, set back from the street, nested safely against the playground and over the fire station--Hampton District Court, New Hampshire's answer to vigilante justice and my assignment. This white clapboard piece of Americana has been here a while. The giant oaks and elms surround it, shading the playground and firetrucks, giving an air of permanence and solidarity to the Grange-like structure.

Late as usual I enter through the heavy oak doors and climb the steep narrow foyer stairs to the second floor. I slink past the clerk's open door trying to remain anonymous. Inside, the spacious, high-ceilinged courtroom languishes in the undisturbed heat of the closed windows. A feeling of tradition and propriety emanates from the elevated judge's bench and witness box. I sense that civilization crawling up from the sea stopped and visited here.

I can't hear the clerk's instructions to the defendants through the ringing in my ears. I tug on my ear lobes and pray the allergy medication I have just taken will work quickly. As I wait, the woman sitting next to me brings me up to the moment on the events of the morning. These people are from the Seabrook anti-nuclear protest of May 24th, court hasn't really started, the protestors have been told what their rights are and they have been given three different pleas that they can enter, guilty, nolo contendere, or innocent. I watch the defendants circulate and form groups by plea choice. I'm tempted to go up and join in one of the groups thinking how interesting these people look.

My ears still haven't cleared and despite the powder blue and eggshell decor I feel my tension mount. The allergy medication is pushing my heart rate up, demanding conscious awareness of my anxiety-- this court sends people to jail! The word itself bounces around inside my head like a grenade with the pin pulled. I could plead insanity and get this writing assignment changed to something less threatening. I start to get up--wishing I had worn sneakers. Half way up, knees bent, I plow head first into the judge's leg as he walks down the aisle. I sit dazed listening to the judge call the court to order. I fumble through my pocketbook and find my favorite pen. Armed with a new pad of paper I start to write. I can feel the anxiety drain safely to the paper. I write everything down until I reach the middle of the pad and realize this is the paper I had to give up Thursday lunch for.

The judge sentences the first group of protestors who pleaded guilty to one hundred and ten dollars in fines or twenty hours of community service work. They take the work. No jail, guards or separation from pets. I can feel my muscles relax and the pain in my chest release as my ability to focus returns. Court, like a poisonous snake in a glass cage, is fascinating.

The next two groups of protestors are tried. The group pleading nolo contendere are given the same sentence as the “guilty” protestors. Next the protestors pleading innocent are tried. The evidence is given and the identifications are made while the cop struts and the protestors eloquently hold their ground. Five of the six protestors are found guilty and given the same sentence as the other defendants. One of the defendants who had not made a statement and was not cross-examined is found innocent. The judge said he could not be sure the protestor heard the warning to leave the reactor site. The warnings were given over the bullhorn and personally explained to each of the protestors before they were arrested; the defendant is not deaf. How can the judge believe the protestor had not heard the warnings? Does the judge believe he didn’t hear the warnings?

I hurry out to the parking lot searching for my brother’s car keys. I start the car, then lay my head on the steering wheel. It takes a while before I realize I need a drive along the beach to cure my allergy. As I drive past the ocean, back to the highway, I stop at Rt. 107 and 1 for a disabled truck. Bored with staring at the car in front of me, I start checking out the rear view mirror. It takes a moment for me to realize I’ve been staring at the stacks of the Seabrook nuclear reactor.

Polly’s leash is lying next to me on the seat. I pick it up and slowly run it through my fingers feeling its strength. Holding it next to my face I remember how wonderful it feels to lose myself in her fur and throw my arms around her when I’m scared. I see her muzzle graying with age and remember the promise I made to be with her always; but somewhere in that reactor a component can fail, a distracted employee can make a mistake, an automated system can go awry, construction or design errors can manifest themselves, the earth can shake its fist at this abomination and tear holes in it and no one can contain the radiation. My life can end here as I wait, stranded on this evacuation route and Polly will die alone.



The Stone

Stone is the substance of the world.
In no matter what shape or form,
It is forever.
It shows no emotion,
It feels no pain,
Existing only where it lies;
Stubborn in its ways.

The short-sighted can become
Frustrated with its being.
Defacement, abuse and surface graffiti
Are all that they can present,
And shallow scars are all that are left behind:
"Ruth was here."

Left out to face the storms of the seasons,
Erosion leaves the wrinkles of age.

Yet those not seeking immediate supplication
Can see beyond this empty surface.
If you look closely,
You can see the very elements that make up the stone.
You can see the very reason it exists.

Patience and attention: the keys to understanding its ways.
A stone can even be broken, along certain lines,
All you need is a compromise.
It can be hewn into a masterpiece.
It can become more than an ugly token
Of someone else's bitterness.

Sculpture is priceless:
It brings out the beauty of a stone
And of the person who formed it.
Its reward cannot be forgotten,
For a creator's life is just a speck of time,
Stone is forever.

Andrew

I've known Andrew for many mornings now;
Presenting himself in his regimented way
at counter's end.

He flips through the morning paper
Absorbing all the latest drabble;
Never an argument that finds Andrew
ill-informed.

He patiently sips his cup of coffee,
Refilling it once it is half consumed.

I've eyed him intently on some days,
But he seems to notice nothing of his company.
He only perceives what's in black and white.

This morning he read from front to back,
And time slipped away from him.
It was a shocking realization once he
grasped the hour.

Placed at the mercy of his habits,
He tortured himself to swallow down
The hot substance of his morning routine,
Lest he be late for the day.



A Day In The Life Of A Woman

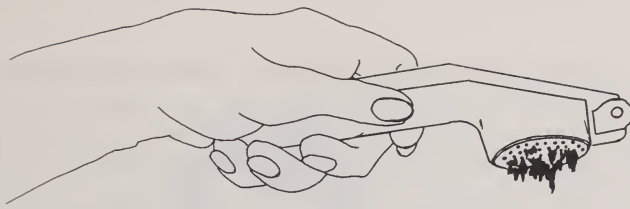
by Janet H. Mayne

Jesse was awakened by blaring music from the clock radio. How could it be 4:30 when she felt she had only just closed her eyes? She rolled onto her back and looked over at her husband, Chris. He was such a pretty little thing — beautiful blue eyes, smooth complexion, delicate features, and silky blonde hair. And that body! Any woman would envy her when she walked into a room with Chris on her arm. The fact that Chris was so devoted to her and looked up to her as he did filled Jesse with even more pride.

As Jesse rose and began getting ready for work, she was already thinking of all the problems she would face that day. Just the drive to Boston was a harrowing experience, enough to raise anyone's blood pressure. If she left even a minute later than 5:30, she'd never get there by 7:00. Her career as owner and president of one of the largest construction companies in the area had challenges of its own. The biggest problem she would deal with today was in regard to those damn laws — the ones that said her company had to hire a certain percentage of men, blacks, and other minorities. The personnel department knew the law but they seemed to be having trouble meeting the quotas. And if the quotas weren't met, the company would have to pay fines.

It wasn't that she didn't want her company hiring men. The real problem was finding men who were qualified. There just weren't many men who could do the work that construction entailed — heavy lifting, long, hard days, not to mention the razzing they'd get from the women. Many of the women resented having to work with men. "Why give the jobs to men when there are plenty of women who are ready, willing and able to work?" they asked. Some said that the men were either gay or had a deep-seated desire to be a woman. Anyway, it didn't seem natural for men to be doing such feminine work. Jesse understood that the lure of union wages — about \$20 an hour — was one of the reasons, but her life would be much simpler if men would stick to men's work and leave the real work to the women. As far as quotas went, she had finally resigned herself to paying the fines. That meant that she also had to raise the amount she charged for each job to cover the costs of the fines.

As Jesse was leaving, she stopped to give her sleeping husband a kiss. He usually got up to make breakfast, but he had been sleeping so peacefully that Jesse hated to wake him. Chris was taking college courses these days. Jesse was encouraging him to go to nursing or secretarial school, but Chris was still undecided. It was just like a man not to know what he wanted. Chris was lucky he didn't have to make the kinds of decisions that Jesse did. Her life would be much simpler if all she had to worry about was what courses to take, what to cook for supper and keeping her figure trim. That's probably why Chris didn't have high blood pressure and the beginnings of an ulcer, as Jesse did.



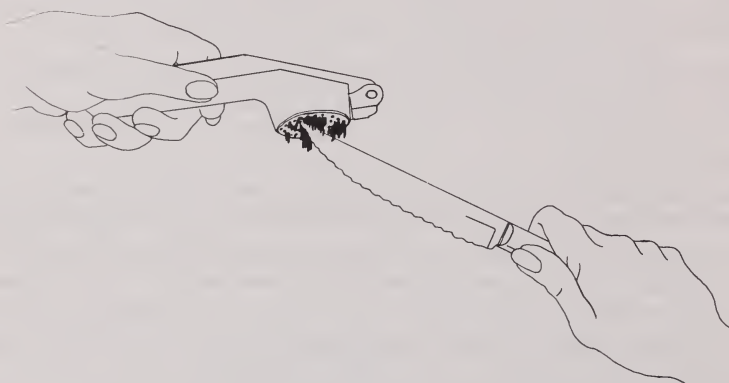
The college courses had been Chris' idea. He said he needed something that gave him a sense of accomplishment and direction. Jesse could understand that but she didn't understand why Chris didn't find his work at home — taking care of the house and Jesse — to be fulfilling enough. What he really needed was a baby. What could be more fulfilling than to give your wife a daughter? That's what Jesse wanted more than anything. A daughter who would carry on the family name and who would eventually run the company that she had worked so hard to build. And what better way for Chris to gain a sense of direction? The responsibility of raising a daughter was awesome, the most important job that a man could undertake. But Chris insisted that he wanted to do something for himself first. So he selfishly continued to take his birth control pills every morning.

After a long, hard day at work, Jesse began the long commute home. If traffic was bad going in, it was three times worse trying to get home. Hopefully, Chris would have supper cooking and a fresh pot of coffee waiting when she got home. Jesse was so bone tired at the end of the day that all she wanted to do was eat supper and then sit back and relax in front of the T.V. Chris didn't seem to understand how she felt. He would immediately begin to bombard her with little problems of the day: the car wouldn't start, there was a mistake on the phone bill, one of the neighborhood kids trampled the roses in the garden. Of course, he would also go on about school, and whether or not he'd make an "A" on the next test. It wasn't that Jesse wasn't interested in Chris' activities — it was just that she was either too tired or preoccupied with more important things than to sit and listen to all that as soon as she got home.

Chris had begun to complain that Jesse wasn't interested in what he was doing and that she never listened, really listened to what he was saying. He said he needed someone to talk to. Jesse had suggested that he get together with Terry, a househusband who lived a couple of doors down. They could have lunch, go shopping, bake cookies together. That would give him someone to talk to about the trivial stuff, anyway.

Sex was another subject altogether. Jesse loved Chris and enjoyed a close, caring relationship. But, sometimes, he was just too tired to spend hours being romantic, extending the amount of time spent on foreplay, and then holding him and caressing him after they made love. Well, maybe more than just sometimes — most of the time he was too tired for all of that. She really did want Chris to be happy but she didn't understand why he was making such an issue out of it. He certainly didn't act like that before they got married. Back then he could barely say the word "sex" without blushing. Then, there was this new thing Chris had come up with. He said he wanted to spend time touching, holding and caressing without actually making love. Jesse couldn't believe that Chris actually expected her to get herself all worked up and then turn it off just like that. He didn't seem to understand that women, unlike men, have strong sex drives that are just not controlled that easily. A woman can't be expected to turn it on and turn it off just like that, even if a man can.

Now Chris was nagging her about going to a “Men’s Awareness” group. Jesse had no idea what it was about, but she guessed it would probably be a group of men complaining about their wives and all their problems. Chris insisted that they should both go, that both would benefit from the experience. Jesse wondered how she could squeeze another ounce of energy out of her tired body to drag herself to a damn meeting — for men — at the end of the day. Besides, she had plenty of problems of her own without having to listen to someone else’s. But, since Chris was so insistent about it, she agreed to try it. Maybe it would improve their relationship — at least they’d be spending the extra time together that Chris seemed to think was so important. And, who knows? Maybe she’d learn something after all!



The Morning Tide by Tod A. Colby

Etching gold and orange sparkles into the gray ocean waves, the sun begins to burn away the misty veil of morning. It’s been a long time coming as I’ve awaited the arrival of my closest friend to chase away the clouds that have been dampening my life.

I must come back to myself though, as a trickle of human life awakens the silent beach. But, these are not tourists, for they tend to sleep late on these careless days of summer. These are the fishermen rushing in to catch the morning tide. They’ll stay for a while longer than myself, and leave before the first blanket laden vacationer comes to stake this claim; they’ll even charge you money just to park your car.

Here is somebody new: a photographer, an artist like myself, come to catch the mood of the day before joining the rest of the throng in civilized society. I write about him and he takes my picture. For a moment there is a world of understanding between us, and not a word is spoken, only the mutual nod of confirmation: the image has been captured.

I would like to stay and meet the strangers, but alas, my time is finished; my tears have been dried. I must move on to beat the public to a morning paper and a cup of coffee.



Joan Corvins 1986

Snow on Rooftop

Melted over the edge
Doubled over unto itself
Soft on the flat
Hard in the corners
White and grey
Long patches
Small stripes
Jagged edges
Smooth inclines
Softened into slush
Frozen into ice
Wind blown
Sunlit bright
Around for weeks
Gone in a day
The time signature of a season.

—Bernard Arseneau

The Dream

by Timmy Casazza

When I was a little boy, my father brought me to church every Sunday morning. It was then that I decided I wanted to be a priest. I loved seeing the woman dressed in the colorful vestments. I admired the way she led the worshippers in prayer.

When I told my dad about my dream, he laughed and said, “Only women can be priests.” Realizing how bad I felt he then told me “You know what? You could be a nun when you’re older.”

As a boy I was satisfied with the ambition of being a nun. I thought, “Well, they’re one and the same, just a different title.” It all made sense back then. Unfortunately, as I grew older, I realized nuns didn’t assume the same roles. Most importantly, I wouldn’t be able to perform the beautiful ceremonies at Christmas, Easter or weddings.

Even after I entered the convent, my desires still lingered. Being a nun was an honor and the convent I belonged to did many wonderful services for our community. Yet, deep down, I felt this was not my true destiny. I was born to celebrate Mass, to bring together a community under my God’s church every Sunday.

To become a priest would mean picketing Masses and protesting against the church. I don’t have the nerve to speak against my church or endanger my current status.

I often wonder how people can decide that one of God’s greatest gifts — the gift of celebrating Mass — is reserved for people who meet certain physical requirements. Sadly, one’s soul, spirit and desire manage only a close second. I can only hope a decision made exclusively by women will allow me to realize a life-long dream.

My dream survives on a few factors. I must hope the number of young women entering the priesthood will keep declining rapidly. Soon, the church will be forced to decide either to allow priests to marry or allow men into the priesthood. I can’t see the church assuming the responsibilities employers usually take on an employee’s family. I guess, from an economic standpoint, it would be cheaper to allow men into the priesthood and keep celibacy. But once again, my dream is the women’s decision, isn’t it.

The Baker

In the early light, when
thoughts were still meek, her hands
assured her of a place, as she made
those spiral mounds, molded
step-by-step the robin's nests.

The dough, conforming to
the kneading of her palms, pressed thin,
always rose, as if a bulb lifting from
winter's sleep.

Long, thin ropes raised
slightly, then brought to cloak around
themselves, encircling, like the comfort
of a scarf, wrapped, tracing one's nape.
Then, between the furrows, the bellyful of
contours, kissed by the heat of
an oven, a steady stream of sienna melts.

In the early light, carefully
arranging these pastries onto
laced doilies, set behind glass, she senses
their presence; these daily offerings,
handbuilt sculptures, votives to a familiar god.

Frida's Solace

They say
you need help
for the sickness, the malaise, the stunted
perspective of time
they say
you've defined.
They approach from a distance, and converge like
children fascinated, poking at a flesh of a
corpse.
The image begins
with you, bare standing,
blood dripping down insides of
thighs.
The mother fertilizing the earth with
rich clumps of menstrual fluids that find
brilliance shooting, bursting in alizarin
flocks.
Brows beat
like crows' wings, separating to expand, then
contract across
the stillness of your forehead. As thoughts
wander, the hairs spread. Diego,
Diego?
Reminiscence stretches
like thick black strips, bands
worn by linked arms in marches for solidarity.
Teresa pulls yellow and green threads
through cotton, planting a garden
of flowers in cloth.
She remembers
how you looked
wrapped in your shawl
the face emerging from her blouse,
the dark brown palette crowned
with taut black braids, the deep red lips
painted, remaining firm.
She remembers
the woman in proud stance, one leg grounded,
one uplifted, with penetrating eyes and
a clenched fist.
In autumn, they
move like mourners making
offerings to assuage their grief.

Frida's Dream

In this painting,
she lets down her hair, untying knots
the braid opening like a thick black curtain
across her face, though
only partially veiling
her tears.

Diego,
she thinks, you
are so far away, though
his face rests on her forehead
imprinted on her life
like a marriage vow,
the marriage of earth and sky
the meaning of Mexico.

How I long to knead your shoulders
thinly to ease, like
tortillas that mama pats
rhythmically against
her palms.
In the dry season, the Indians
come to nourish me
with their milk and
feed me the meat of cactii.
But,
they say I'm of a different mask
and must wait for the bearer of gifts
until
the vegetation covers land again
and the sky becomes a distinct azure
until
the birds again sing notes that
blend, and mesh as alizarin
on the tip of this brush and
the color of the kiss
I give when I meet your lips
and wish you good-night.

Hiyang

There is time
when conversation between two seems
not so
confined to fleeting air.
Words
carefully mesh with silence
echoing the day's events.
The casual and common
are welcomed, as are leftover drops of coffee
that sit on the stove
at dawn, its
vapors still
stifling.

In the afternoon,
garlic scents saturate
my nostrils.
Its juices squeeze between
my fingers, masking last evening's desire.
The digits
which rippled across shoulders
no longer
smell of you. But
still warm
I quickly cut the roots off the onion
unravel the crinkled wrap to
uncover its
spice.

Eagerly
watching the dose of oil
resting at the bottom, I anticipate
sizzling sounds and choreographed
slicings of yellow and green.
I take comfort in this ritual.
Like the tide, it moves me towards reflection.





By *Scott Barlow*

Puffed Rice

by Ruth Trussell

Small puffs of buff-colored rice, like wingless bugs, floating in the milk. Little, aerated wads of cardboard or foam packing material, clustered, as if from static electricity. They adhere to form bunches on the sides of the bowl.

My spoon is like a giant scoop, dipping in, gathering up and lifting to the monstrous, gaping tunnel, above. Again and again, it carries up the almost weightless pellets and carefully puts them into the waiting receptacle, my mouth.

I stare into the bowl, lost in its, monochromatic, belly-soothing contents. White crystals sparkle in the melted snow, — turned white. Boulders, in this small universe, like those on some other planet where there's no gravity, punctuate the wintry scene of this space, a skating pond gone awry because a giant has sprinkled 3-D confetti there, and it froze, then melted, into creamy-white snow, the stones floating, clumped, in disarray.

Huge and slow I sit, my arm and hand like part of a great factory robot, feeding itself with nuts and bolts, then chewing them up and conveying them to some other, unknown place down a long, dark hallway, for the next step in the process. Will there be a shiny, new car? A Sarah Lee Pie? A Campbell Soup can, filled with factory-fresh, over-salted, "just like Grandma made" . . . soup?

The room I am in is like a galaxy. "Oddly shaped stars," . . . I think to myself, "and planets . . ."

The ketchup bottle must be some as yet undiscovered phenomenon. "Is there life here?" I ask.

"And what about the morning paper, the sugar bowl, the salt shaker? What are they really? . . . Yes, there's life."

The inside of the bowl shines, wet with the last traces of melted white and small flecks of pale brown. The utensil, its morning task completed, rests against the rim of this tiny, drought-stricken, pond.

The great robot slowly rises, its hand gripping the rim of the vessel, and makes its way quietly, but heavily, to a processing tank and places the small container into a large pool of frothy, . . . warm, . . . clear liquid. Then a waterfall of more wetness is flushed over it, and it is lifted to still another place and put in a drying rack. "A drying rack . . ." I ponder. "Are there such things in the universe?"

This round boatlike vessel rests, on its edge, droplets of wet adhering to its outside and its inside. It is no longer a pond. There is no white, melted snow, no boulders, now. It is just a bowl in a dish drainer next to the kitchen sink. And the robot is me. Now I am back again . . . My cat sits on the table bathing itself.

Clay

by Joan Wilde

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” *Genesis 2:7.*

Earth the planet, earth the ground we walk on, and earth the mineral, from which we extract many kinds of building materials. Clay, that smooth, sticky, plastic and pliable substance.

If I hold a piece of clay in my hands and squeeze my hand shut, the clay forms itself into the shape of my fist. It shows each crack and crevice of my hand, even the fine lines of my finger prints. How irresistible to my creative powers, my chance to play God.

I can prod, poke, kneed, stamp, toss, and roll that clay — fashioning it to whatever shape I am clever enough to devise.

Take a ball of clay, poke a hole in the middle, then pinch all around and you have a pot such as the earliest man might have made. Making coils, then winding them up, then pressing them together, I can make a pot such as the Indians might have made. The craft of molding clay puts me in touch with hundreds of generations of people who worked with clay, the touch of the fingers into the clay reaching through time to connect me to potters of the past.

Alone, I sit before my potter's wheel, lump of clay waiting to be centered, yet in mystic communion with ghosts of potters long gone. Hands wet, placed on the clay, forcing into submission the awkward lump. Once centered, the shaping begins. Blob of earth becomes vase, cup, or plate. The still glistening creation is then lifted from the wheel to dry. When the object is thoroughly dried, it is baked in the kiln. Now it is no longer the pliable toy. Strengthened by fire it can now be glazed. Fired again to shiny hardness or soft matt sheen, the earth has taken a new shape. From the world's most basic ingredient has come a new form. To be a creator, is this what it means to be created in the image of God?



William
by Susan D'Angelo

"Something horrible has happened," I cried into the phone. "Mum, it's awful."

"What? What's wrong, Sue?" My mother was as near panic as myself. "Oh God, Mum, I just don't know how to tell you." I blubbered. With measured words, my mother's famous "foot" went down.

"Find a way, RIGHT NOW!" she demanded.

"O.K., O.K., I'm pregnant!" I choked silently, "again." There was a momentary pause as her brain computed this information. Feeling the way I did, I mistook this silence for a possible fainting spell. What's this? Laughter? "Surely she is hysterical," I thought. Being a good daughter I immediately tried to calm her "hysteria" with a lie.

"I'll be all right mum, don't worry, I'll manage."

"Manage? Of course you'll manage, you always managed before. Besides," she continued, "this is really fun, there's nothing like some unexpected company to spice up your life." I could have done without this.

My mother has never been a really critical person except when it comes to my insatiable need for order. On this note we constantly disagree and I knew at this point, that this unplanned event was a victory for her just as it had been a defeat for me.

"Rise to the occasion!" my brain said, but my body screamed "TOO OLD, TOO TIRED." That is how little William's life began.

At the delivery I begged the doctor to give me knock-out gas, anything to put off the inevitable. In the nursery, my baby was the easiest to spot. William was the one screaming the loudest, was the homeliest and sported a huge birthmark smacked squarely on his forehead. As we looked down at him through the glass I asked my husband: "Lou, do we really have to bring him home?"

"Susan," Lou said, "that child is so ornery and ugly, they'd track us to earth's end. Face it, Sue, he's ours."

As the days went by, I tried not to compare him with the other three but William just didn't fit in. He did everything opposite us. Sleep, eat, nothing blended including his un-sunny disposition. Desperate, I consulted our pediatrician. By now I had lost all tact and I lunged right in. "What the hell's wrong with this kid? He never sleeps, eats non-stop, screeches unless he's being held and, well, he's so damn ugly!" Guilt welled up inside of me and I drifted my eyes toward poor, pathetic, William only to see him smiling and gurgling at the doctor. This kid was definitely out to get me.

Dr. Felch is a straight-forward kind of man that never assumes you are inferior. Dr. Felch talks right at you and if the news is bad you get bad news. That's what I like about him, he keeps things neat, no time wasting chit chat. Today was no exception. "He's homely all right. (I told you I liked this guy). I have to tell you though that it's simply a matter of his features being too large for his face. We see this a lot in cases of exceptionally beautiful children." As he spoke I tried not to get too encouraged. "As his facial bones grown, everything will fit together and, Viola! One gorgeous child. The birthmark will disappear soon." Mere "like" was not a word to describe how I felt, I loved this

man right here. "Now, for his disposition," he continued. "It's difficult to explain but highly intelligent babies feel trapped in their bodies, their brains are operating in high gear while nature is holding their bodies back. Babies like this will not rest until mind and body can come together. Walking and talking is all this cutie needs." (I no longer loved this man).

"Walking and talking?" I cried, "Doctor, that's two and a half years away. What do I do until then?" The doctor shrugged. "Great" I thought. "I'm definitely in this alone."

One year went by, then two and three. Not much changed. Sure, William toilet trained early and yes, he did sleep more but the need for total attention only increased and my family each made fast turn-about when entering a room that he occupied. Even dear old dad kept himself unusually occupied away from William. I often accused my husband of trying to run away from home.

I had often been plagued by a recurring memory of an event that happened about William's second birthday. On a very unusual day our elderly neighbors of a mere nodding acquaintance dropped over. My husband had been cutting a tree and old Mr. Ducharme kindly had offered his assistance. As was our policy, when the job was finished everyone came in for socializing. Mrs. Ducharme was nice. I liked her best because she minded her own business. I minded mine and my children had been taught to respect our neighbors and their property. I stressed this adamantly to my own children since not many parents in our area agreed with my old-fashioned ideas. However, my children were on the elderly high honor roll and received many an envied gift or candy treat. I was always proud of our "do not disturb" policy and the children had long since learned the benefits they could expect by abiding by it.

Mrs. Ducharme settled into her chair, waddling her rear around to accommodate the siatic and her bulges.

"Oh, so this is William," she said flatly. "Is he a sickly child?"

"Why, No!" I said rather surprised. In spite of his other many faults, William was the picture of health.

"Well," she continued, "I was just saying to the mister how much I hear him cry. Three other babies and barely a whimper, this little one must be poorly since he rarely seems to stop." Lou and I stopped dead. Electricity filled the room and our thoughts melded in the air. This child was destroying all of our neat little unspoken arrangements with life in general.

Mrs. Ducharme was not complaining; she is a kind loving person that was expressing genuine concern for a little stinker that didn't deserve it. How could he dare to break this sacred code? Of course, why not? He had broken all the others. I thought about this scenario often and since it was my nature to turn all evil to good, and all messy to neat "often" in terms of this thought would be an understatement.

"Oh what an adorable child." I ignored what I was hearing. I was standing in the cereal aisle at the supermarket shakily trying to determine which cereal, for what amount of money, would get eaten at a decent pace. You see, if, I get one that tastes too good, the children eat it all at one sitting; however, if it contains too little sugar my three dollar investment waits patiently in the cupboard for the annual bird feeder that is lovingly made at scouts each winter. This is a critical decision that requires maximum concentration.

“Oh, you little angel. Where did you ever get that red hair?” My brain was being jogged. I grabbed the corn pops and tossed them into the basket before I could change my mind. I looked down at William as an aura seemed to appear around his cherub-like being. His mouth began to open and I was suddenly whisked away as if in some slow motion dream where you can’t move but desperately want to. I heard him speak but could hardly believe I was conscious. “Hi,” he said so adorably, “I got my ORANGE hair here at DeMoulas.”

“So cute, so cute.” the woman gushed. “What is your name?”

“William, William D’Angelo and I’m three years old. My brothers Adam and Nicky are at school with my sister Nancy and I’m helping Mommy shop.”

I stood there in a trance while they continued their conversation. The aisle was backing up with smiling shoppers, all enjoying the show. I honestly can’t say how much time passed before I gathered my wits and we said our good-byes and moved along. Nothing was the same after that day. Whoever that woman was, I never saw her again, but if I ever do she will be getting a thank-you from a very grateful family.

I left DeMoulas uplifted; my precious, orange-haired angel in tow. My brain was clicking and new thoughts were flooding in.

After that experience it only took a few days to nail down a problem I had been struggling with for three years. William needs more attention than we could humanly give him alone, so find him a supplement. So very simple!

William is now a model for a prestigious Boston agency. He twists-and-turns gleefully for anyone with a notion to watch and is the pride of the junior fashion world. He attends nursery school, (I insisted on Montessorri) and though a bit young he is exceptional there and flourishes. His teacher is in love with him. He gives her great satisfaction and reinforces her career decision, just like he’s doing for me.

Why did this take so long? Could my mother be right about my inflexibility? Or is it that God, the one who’s house I visit automatically once a week and teach my children about, really does hear us when we’re lost and alone, knowing as only He can, when we really need help.

A class I attend, recently held a mock auction. We were allotted an imaginary sum of money and instructed to bid on social values in order to find out about ourselves and the others in our group. I knew because of my age, and the experiences that accompany it, that my bids would be different, since the median age is nineteen and I’m a ripe old thirty-six, but I was slightly taken aback by my high bid on religion. It showed me that I believe in God as much as He believes in me.

Planning a neatly packaged future as is my passion, I will never tell William the details as I have shared them here. I will tell him only the truth . .

That God loves all the little children and the big ones too. It’s all so simple and logical and above all, orderly.

Sorry Mum, but I do win ‘em all.



For a Brief Moment

I wrote a poem once.
About a special dream.
A dream of meeting that
 special person.
The one who would make my
 heart skip a beat everytime
 he looked at me,
And who would take my breath
 away with just a smile.

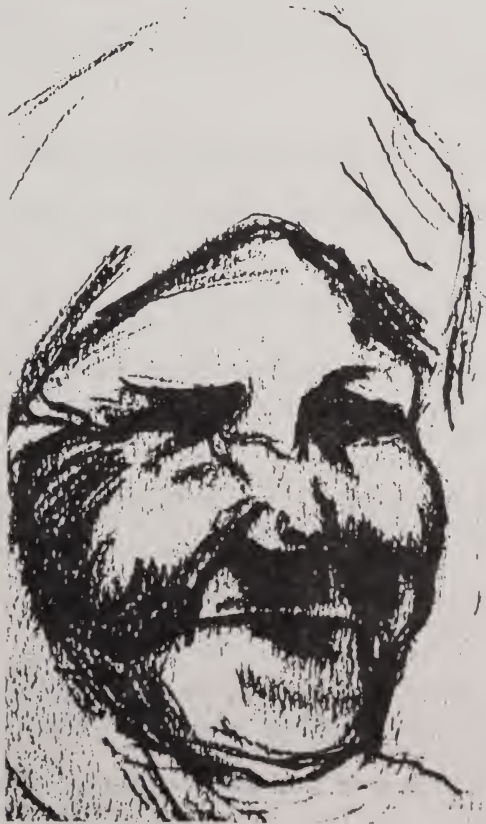
For a brief moment,
That dream came true.
The moment our eyes met,
 my heart skipped a beat;
And when you smiled at me,
 you took my breath away.

But my dream came and went too
 quickly.
You went away, and when you
 left,
You took away your smile and
 my heart.

My only wish now,
Is for my dream to appear
 again.
If not tomorrow...
 someday.

My Dream of You

No one ever knew,
Of the dream I have of you.
The feelings trapped inside,
The sparkle in my eye.
The hunger for your touch,
I care for you so much.
The warmth of your smile,
Makes everything worthwhile.
The sensations that I felt,
Your touch that makes me melt.
The softness of your kiss,
Fills me with such bliss.
The security when you hold me near,
If only you knew how much I care.
For no one ever knew,
Of the dream I have of you.



Father at the Fair

He sat at ease watching people walk by
But when they showed a little interest, a
mild fancy for the goods on his table, he
leaned forward eager for a conversation.

The sun gleamed on the tan of his forehead,
with its patina of fine leather.
His winter hair is shown off against the
background of his ruddy face, his bulbous
nose projecting over a hearty smile of
interest.

Now for the questions he is sure to ask.

"Wouldn't you like to buy a pot for your
plants?"

"Oh, I can't grow anything," the reply.

"You can't . . . Well you must not live
right. All you need is some good soil and
a little sun."

And so it goes . . . they never suspect the
Scope of his inquiries.

Like a master of the inquisition, he
extracts the essence of their lives.

Who they are, where they live, what they
eat for breakfast. Or who their father is,
what he did for a living.
Or where ever this gentle quizzing takes
them.

After a few minutes they are laughing
friends, cool passers-by, or someone
listening to a sage.
Some like his precise enunciation; some
good humorously enjoy this chat with an
old man.

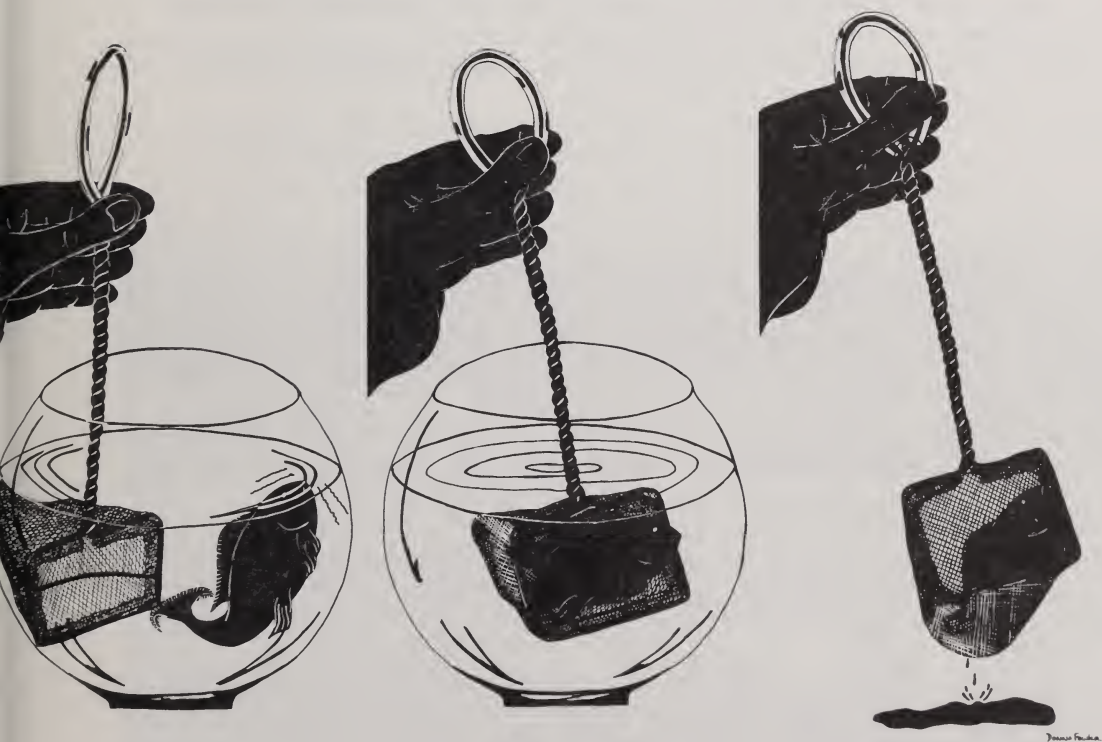
Some spark at the repartee, delighted with
his outrageous remarks.

When they at last move on, he sighs,
The bellows of his creaky lungs depresses
The smile folds back into his mobile face.
His eyes still humorous and mischievous,
Waiting for his next chatty victim.

Vanity Flare

The still dark pond;
Mirror for the crowd
Of vainglorious trees
Fluttering in their new
Fall raiment
Hovering over to see
Their splendid new reflections
Twisting to glimpse
A golden limb
Bowing to reveal
New scarlet flounces
Weeping when their leafy spangles
Drift gently down to adorn
The placid looking glass.





Francis Frick

A Strange Captivation

by Scott Cornell

I smelled smoke but the smell of smoke was just something you lived with when your only source of heat was a woodstove. The odor, like that of standing in billows of campfire smoke, was one familiar to everyone in our small northern community. The smell of it would linger with you to work, to school, or to Thursday afternoon shopping. It would also become for me a trigger for powerful, gut-wrenching memories.

It wasn't the smell that distracted me from a "Three's company" return that fateful afternoon, it was a yell from the basement. I ran to the basement stairs. Thick smoke filled the stairwell. A faint glow came from a bare light bulb at the bottom. The dim light looked miles away as it strained through the shrouding smoke.

I yelled down for my father. He answered me and I immediately felt the anxiety in his words, a feeling rarely revealed by the proud man. My pulse raced as I worked my way down into the smoke.

I didn't have to see the flames to know they were coming from the far corner of the cellar where our woodstove was.

Woodstoves are known for the dry heat they produce. I can recall some earlier times spent gazing at the floor joists that made up our basement ceiling, fascinated by the way pine sap was slowly oozing out of the aged and drying lumber. I would think to myself of how fast this house would go up if it ever caught fire.

I didn't have to wonder any more.

I found my father swatting at growing flames. I stood useless for a few moments. The flames captured my eyes and my mind as they climbed the walls. The room grew darker from the thickening smoke except for the primal light in front of me.

I heard the sound of water in the distance over the crackling flames. My father had been filling a bucket. It now seemed useless but he still tried it in desperation.

I stumbled in the smoke to the place where I last had seen a fire extinguisher. I found two but grabbed one. When I reached the burning wall, which had spread its flames to the ceiling, I had the pin pulled loose and the lever depressed.

Nothing.

I cursed as I ran for the second. But by this time even a fire extinguisher was hopeless. From the time I had called down to my father, maybe two minutes earlier, the fire had spread ten-fold and the smoke had become completely choking.

We rationally, but regretfully, left the house with no time to even grab a jacket, no time to grab anything. Not five minutes passed until the entire house was alive with flames.

I tried for a coat I knew was just inside the door but I was beaten back by the leaping fire.

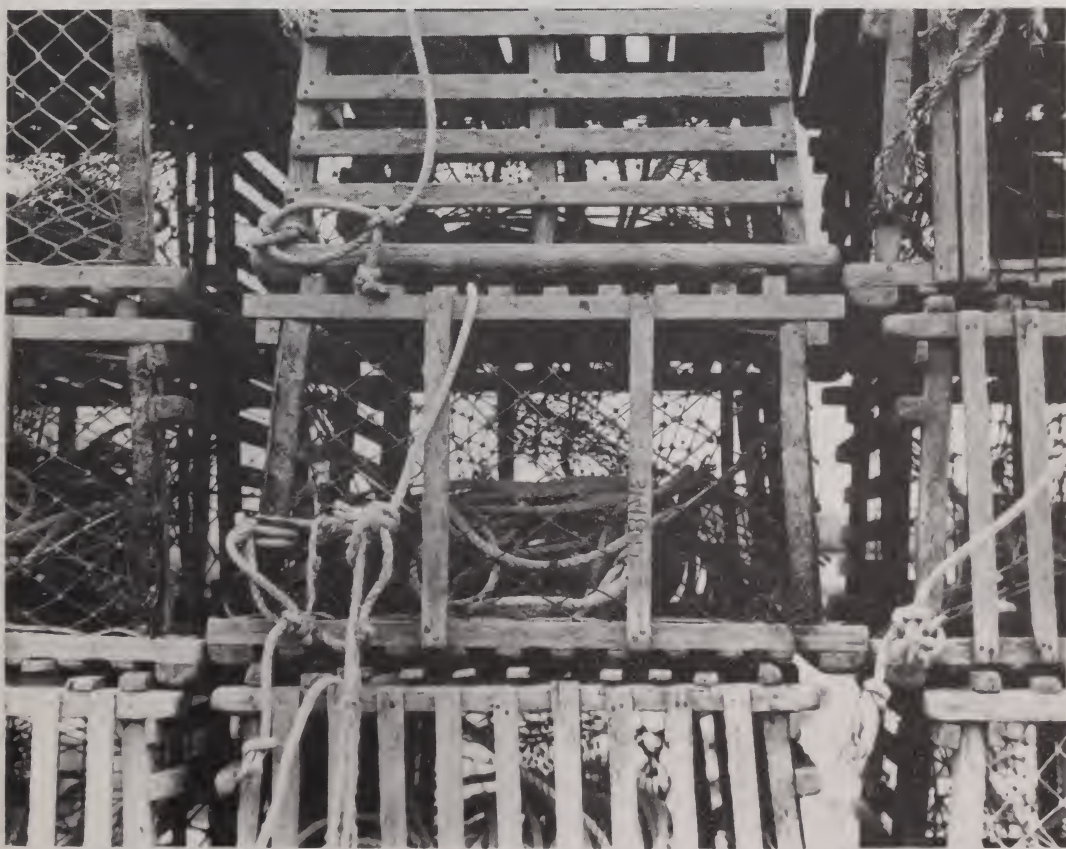
It was a clear and cold winter night in Michigan. I stood close to the house, welcoming the heat radiating from it. My eyes were glued to the brilliant flames. They seemed alive. Alive and evil, just waiting for someone to wander within their deadly reach, flicking forked and poisonous tongues from every window.

Every time I won my consciousness back from the hypnotic fire I would notice more people. They flocked into my yard. I knew them all, of course. The all-volunteer fire department pulled up with its entire fleet. Two fire engines, a tanker, and a four-wheel-drive pickup. Two of the four dated back to the 1940's.

Friends and neighbors surrounded me, all trying to be as helpful and comforting as possible. Their words passed right over me. I just remember the flames, which were now through the roof, stretching for the ancient white pines that towered above our house.

The total waste and the thought of owning only what I wore was on my mind. I could hear my mother somewhere off behind me, crying. But my eyes remained fixed, left to the will of the dancing flames.

My best friend approached me, wrapped his coat around me, and walked me into the dark night. The darkness was total except for the flashing lights of the trucks and the orange glow that generated from my betraying home.





The Path

by Sean Sullivan

We walked along the edge of the pond, neither of us saying much but both of us thinking plenty.

"Ah, look, a path," I said, breaking the most recent silence. "Who could resist a path!"

"But do you know where it leads?" she asked.

"No, I don't," I replied.

We entered the opening in the trees without breaking, but neither quickening, our stride. I thought little more of the path until we were well into the wooded area, which now enveloped us, and I haltingly slipped my left arm around the small of her back. She was receptive and I pulled her against me, until an admonishing stone or twig caused us to lose our balance, as we had strayed just off the track, and we fell apart.

Walking on, I think we both seemed to realize how absurd this silence between us was, considering how unpretentious our conversation had always been at school. Maybe it was that we were intimidated by the novelty of the situation, or thinking of her other concern — farther still and my anxiety turned to urgency.

"Look at that fallen tree," I said softly and with all the nonchalance I could muster. "It looks like a good place to rest a minute."

Almost before I finished speaking, as if having anticipated the proposal, she had altered her gait and changed direction, headed now toward the horizontal elm which paralleled the path.

We both sat, gingerly at first, testing the perch against our weight. When we came to a full rest, I slid a bit closer and for a modifying instant, each with arms between legs, our eyes searched the ground in front of us for a cue.

Before long we almost simultaneously lifted our heads and our eyes met tentatively. She broke first and started a gaze to the left but I reached out with my right hand and gently cupped the left side of her face, easing her attention back toward me. She returned effortlessly and we suddenly fell into a tight embrace.

There in her arms on that fallen elm by the path, with my face buried in her long, thick hair, I was happy except that I wished I could turn more toward her. As we sat, my position was not the most facilitative, but I thought that it would do for a start.



Confession Box

by Ed Theriault

When I was a child, I actually thought life was a bowl of popcorn clicking in the popping machine. Mama reminded me to go to Confession. I conjured up visions of punishment when she explained what Confession meant. It was a very traumatic experience for me to prepare to share my sins with a priest.

The following night, I went. The church was fragrant with the smell of the flowers blossoming into rich holiness. I knelt down on the floor in front of the cross that was engraved with the Jesus. My legs were pretty badly shaken up. The church seemed gloomy and quiet as the votive candles reflected the innocence in my eyes. The absence of the organ music haunted me as if the door slam could've been the sharp edge of God's voice. I concentrated on my prayers.

Since I had always assumed life was full of laughter and fairytales, I began to realize a terror that made my heart pound when I saw Jesus's face. He was hanging on the cross. I panicked. "Oh, no, I don't want a death sentence. What did I do wrong?"

As I waited for my turn to make a Confession, I feared what was in the Confession box. I begged Mama to go in there with me. I tugged on her hand. She refused to accompany me. I was terrified. When I got in the Confession box, the elegant red curtain closed in front of my face blocking out the light. I felt trapped in a box that I thought I would never escape from. I felt isolated in the darkness. I wanted to have the light on because I can't hear. I've lived all my life in a silent world and this new dark world horrified me. My hands trembled as I confessed my sins to the priest whose face was covered by the small square screen. I wondered who was talking to me. The tone of the priest's husky voice and his bald head frightened me. I repeated his words, "In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit." I struggled to understand what he said to me. I became irritated with the priest's mask. I couldn't remember my confession. I heard the priest's voice, not the voice that I dreamed and fantasized about — the voice of God speaking clearly to me — but only a priest's weak indistinct voice. I explained to Father, "I am sorry. I can't hear you. I need to read your lips; open the screen." He didn't respond. I confessed my sins and slipped out of the Confession box and walked toward the cross one more time only hoping I was forgiven because I could not hear my penance. I knelt down shortly before I headed for the holy water to press it on my forehead. "In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit." I left the church in total innocence.

The Road To Kansas

The wooden butt of the steel blue shotgun pushes snugly against my shoulder as my fingers wrap around its barrel. I ready my right hand over the trigger. Slowly I pull back...outside a limb falls from the rotting oak--it draws me back from my daydream and reminds Polly of her arch enemy, the phantom burglar. I quiet her fears, then visit the kitchen for some coffee before settling myself back down to my homework. Stretching out I come eye to eye with my nemesis--the phone. We understand each other, we don't like each other, but we understand--it will continue to interrupt when I am involved in any sort of a project and when I belong somewhere else it will tie me here. If I had a grenade I could take that polymer vexation out of my life. The vision of little bits of Ma Bell's finest floating down to the faded carpeting gives a primal sense of satisfaction--a cord here, a dial there, a receiver hanging from the mantelpiece like a gift waiting for Santa.

I hear the clapper's angry grating demanding my undivided attention. I hold back a moment to ponder the situation--this is an issue of control. That creation of a warped mind is not going to disrupt my well-ordered existence. I'm coming--Hello, nice of you to call...yes, it has been awhile...two weeks, gosh. How have you been...no, it's not that...come on, I've got school, homework, two jobs, a car that's leaving parts all over route 97, and a sick dog...you bought what? — tickets to a ball game! I hate ball games...I know they are hard to come by...but...it's the night before finals! No, I really can't go...some other time...

Setting the vulture on its perch I grab my novel and find the marker. As the evening wears on I lose myself in the story. Again I'm brought back from my reverie by its relentless pursuit of my attention. I try and stare the little predator down--I'm bigger than it is, I have opposing thumbs and walk upright, and I know where the trash compactor lives. It holds its ground. Polly is becoming agitated by the noise. Attention must be paid. I consider my options then quietly slink below its line of fire. Like a puma stalking its prey, my deft fingers encircle its moulded white body, edging over to its umbilical cord. With the hands of a trained surgeon I release the tension on its lifeline and pull the connector free. Again I pick up my novel, settle into my easy chair and reflect on the wisdom of a young girl from Kansas--there is no place like home.

TAOS

Sun's kid
hero mine
in positive degree
remarkably, singularly
curious for me.

Hero my heart
here humble now
dealer of the dawn
time came, fate took
time again today.

Sun's kid
wind child
dweller of the plain
somewhere above Taos
lost in the rain.

The Covenant *for Paddy*

The ancient warrior raises her graying muzzle slowly pulling the alluring scent from the air; she rises to the call. Beneath her ebony and gray coat decorated as a Rosebud Sioux Buckskin her muscles rhythmically tense. Relying somewhat on memory to lead her to her destination she brushes my leg as she passes. Aware of my touch she stops, turns, and offers the wealth of her sable ringlets. Slipping my fingers through their tousled mass, I kiss her head. The sculptured grace of her muzzle reflects the last light of day. I start to trace the scars of battles engraved on her face but with greater purpose she hurries me along. Alert to the approaching evening and the rhythm of her drumming feet I move to our appointed destination. She has been my guide through hard years in a new land, she calms my heart. We are bound, this warrior and I. The ceremonial bowl is offered and accepted.





Billowing Clouds

Billowing clouds
sweetly drifting, softly hovering
in the warm, blue . . .
above me.
Lost in thought,
I walk,
in a field of Monarchs, not knowing . . .
First one, then one more, and another, are suddenly there,
and I am soaring . . .
with the mystical sight of a thousand majestic creatures.

The scent of a thousand thousand blades of grass on a hillside, newly cropped . . .
like the fresh shaved chin of some enormous, friendly creature, as it lies
with its betrothed in a dream fairytale . . . I, like a tiny spec on his face,
look out across the hills which are shoulders, breasts and thighs.

—Ruth Trussell



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